

Stuck in Reverse

An update from the National and Western States Troopers Conferences.

By Doug Massie Southcentral Vice President ATC

Last month President Cox and I had the pleasure of attending the National Troopers Coalition and Western States Conferences. After attending both meetings one thing is clear to me, our department is stuck in reverse. The lack of progressive leadership and working with the administration to resolve issues is evident within DPS. It was a pleasure to see other agency's command staff united with the Troopers to accomplish common goals which benefit both sides of the table. I was certainly envious of the positive relationships our fellow officers are able to maintain with their respective leaders. Don't get me wrong, not all of the departments are doing that well, several right to work states are struggling to make ends meet, but the states that are working together with department leaders are very successful in securing desirable pay and benefits packages.

NTC

The National Troopers Coalition meeting (NTC) was held in Detroit, Michigan on September 19, 2006. Although we are not active members of the NTC, we were invited by the executive board to attend at their expense, which we gladly accepted. The NTC is comprised of roughly 40,000 Troopers and Highway Patrol nationwide and has lobbyists in Washington D.C. who are well respected in congress. Several issues were discussed during the two day meeting, some of the issues were pertinent to ATC, some of them were not. An issue regarding an officer's right to freedom of speech was brought up during the conference and it immediately reminded me of the many times in my career when I received an email or department directive designating who I can and can't talk to. There are court decisions that outline an officer's freedom of speech; we are afforded the same basic rights as a normal citizen so long as we are not speaking on behalf of the department. The conference was an opportunity to exchange contract information and compare what works and what doesn't. With our contract negotiations just around the corner I feel our attendance to the NTC conference will prove dividends when negotiating the contract for 2008. Both President Cox and I feel strongly that ATC should be member of this great organization.

WESTERN STATES

The Western States conference was held in Salt Lake City, Utah on September 22, 2006. Although the Western states conference wasn't as formal as the NTC meeting I found it equally informative. Again, as I saw with the NTC conference, the departments that were most successful had positive relationships with their command staff. The issue of privatized retirement came up at the Western States. Colorado, Washington, and Oregon are all facing the same problem with defined contribution retirement plans. After

speaking with the other at states one thing is clear, defined contribution plans don't work for state government, recruitment and retention fall and the department suffers.

Other states that have tried 401K type plans and end up reverting back to a defined benefits plan. The question is how long will we have to suffer? Time will tell. A decision was made to hold the 2007 Western States Conference in Alaska. The dates are June 26-27, 2007, any help or suggestions are appreciated.

Lesson Learned

The most valuable lesson learned when attending these conferences is that we have brothers and sisters across the nation fighting the same battles. Attending these conferences is a chance for us to learn from one another and help one another to secure fair wages and benefits for the good job we do every day. I was proud and thankful for the opportunity to represent ATC at these meetings. I have additional information from the conferences I can make available upon request.